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How Can Culturally-responsive Instruction Help Middle and High School Teachers Address Muslim Students' Needs?

Mona Aly

How Can Culturally-responsive Instruction Help Middle and High School Teachers Address

Muslim Students' Needs?

by

Mona Mohamed Aly

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Capstone Project Facilitator: Maggie Struck

Content Reviewer: Tamer Abdel Hamid

DEDICATION

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٦٢)

Say: "Verily, my prayers, my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of all that exists." **[The Holy Quran, Chapter 6:162]**

Taking this verse to heart, I dedicate this work to spreading peace, promoting acceptance, and appreciating diversity among people, as Allah, God Almighty instructed. Thus, this is a gift to my nieces, Mo'mina and Maryam, my nephew Muhammad, all my students, and all Muslim children growing up in the U.S.A. and their families. To every dedicated educator, be it Muslim or non-Muslim, who strives to be culturally responsive and supportive to their students. To administrators and stakeholders who strive to create and maintain culturally responsive, all-inclusive learning environments.

وَمِنْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ خَلْقُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَٰنِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّلْعَٰلِمِينَ (٢٢)

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and **<u>the diversity of your languages and your colors</u>**. Indeed in that are signs for **<u>those of knowledge</u>**.

[The Holy Quran, Chapter 30:22]

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In this capstone project, I am focusing on how middle and high school teachers could use culturally responsive instruction to build positive relationships with Muslim students and address their individual needs. My research question for this capstone project is: ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** Teachers must understand how greatly cultural and religious practices affect their students' learning. When it comes to Muslim students, teachers need to understand that they have unique cultural identities based on their religious beliefs as Muslims. These practices put all Muslims under the same umbrella regardless of their nationalities, languages, skin color, or cultural backgrounds. Therefore, when teachers familiarize themselves with these cultural and religious practices, they can better connect with their Muslim students and address their individual needs.

In this capstone project, I will highlight some critical religious and cultural practices for Muslim students and how they may directly impact students' academic progress, social life, and self-esteem. I will also discuss how culturally responsive educators may use their understanding of these religious and cultural practices to address Muslim students' academic and social needs. As a final product, I developed a one-week professional development program for non-Muslim educators interacting with Muslim students throughout the school year. I will build my professional development on the accommodations mentioned in Chapter Two. The literature covered in my professional

development would offer practical solutions and serve as an academic resource for stakeholders with the same or similar concerns.

In Chapter One, I will define culturally responsive pedagogies (CRP) and how Muslim students are considered a growing population of culturally and linguistically diverse minorities in the U.S. I will examine how teachers could use culturally responsive strategies to validate their students' cultural identities and build strong relationships with them and their families. Moreover, I will shed light on some dominant narratives that affect Muslim students' education and share my personal and professional connection to this topic.

As the third major religion in the U.S., the number of Muslim students is increasing in today's classrooms nationwide due to the increased number of immigrants and/or the conversion of U.S. citizens to Islam. Zhang-Wu (2017) mentions that in mainstream K–12 classrooms, more students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDs) have been added due to increased immigration. Heineke & McTighe (2018) also discuss how in 2014, White students ceased to be the majority in US schools, dropping below 50% of total student enrollment for the first time in the history of contemporary American schooling. Muslim students are considered CLD students. As a growing population in the U.S. educational system, schools should be responsive to CLD students' needs while acknowledging their strengths and validating their cultural differences.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is a method that acknowledges *all* cultures in the classrooms and seeks to empower minority groups by building on their linguistic

and cultural backgrounds to sustain positive schooling experiences. Teachers must understand how greatly culture affects their students. Culture shapes and influences how we learn, while learning impacts our values. For teachers to follow culturally responsive pedagogies, they should engage in an ongoing process of understanding that culture has a role in education and actively learning about students' cultures, beliefs, and communities.

Embracing culturally responsive pedagogy in today's classrooms could improve students' cognitive skills, inspire many Muslim students to succeed academically, and appreciate their cultural heritage and who they are as learners and citizens. Hollie (2018) defines cultural and linguistic responsiveness as "The validation and affirmation of "indigenous" home culture and language for building and bridging the students to succeed in the culture of Academia and mainstream Society." (p.27) In general, when minoritized students are successful academically, they will less likely drop out. Hence, schools will fight ignorance, unemployment, and crime with education, and the school-to-prison pipeline will eventually close, impacting communities' social and economic aspects.

Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) Vs. Traditional Methods of Instruction

In the traditional methods of instruction, teachers use one-size-fits-all curricula and strategies that ignore individual linguistic and cultural differences and needs. According to Martusewicz et al. (2021), this approach looks at minoritized students as students who come from a home situation that failed to provide the necessary values, fundamental skills, and attitudes for school success. Therefore, Minority students are often referred to as "at-risk", indicating a greater likelihood of failing.

In the CRI approach, as Heineke and McTighe (2018) explain, CRI honors students' cultural backgrounds and linguistic experiences and provides them with a learning environment that is aligned with their cultural backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences. CRI helps educators be culturally competent and think outside the box to be creative in building lessons and activities around students' needs and strengths.

Simpson-Butler (2011) warns that personal bias and lack of cultural knowledge may be roadblocks to student achievement since some teachers may feel they are stepping outside their comfort zone when asked to pursue culturally responsive practices such as going on home visits or doing community walks to learn more about their students. Educators must be aware of their biases and prejudices and be open-minded about learning about different cultures. They also need to acknowledge that parents and community members are the primary source of information and the master key to accessing students' cultures. Simpson-Butler (2011) adds that one of the most significant challenges in creating an atmosphere that encourages open dialogue is acknowledging and developing support for group members' awkwardness when sharing. Many families feel uncomfortable participating in their children's educational process due to the lack of language abilities. Therefore, educators may find it challenging, in many cases, to find ways to successfully reach out to parents and encourage them to open up and take part in their children's education.

Dominant Narratives Affecting Muslim Students

Martusewicz et al. (2021) discuss how the issue of accommodating minority students in U.S. schools has been rooted for over a century as African Americans migrated from the Southern United States to other regions and more immigrants arrived

in the U.S. According to the White dominant group, minoritized groups' cultures and languages did not facilitate the development of skills, habits, and ways of thinking necessary for educational and economic success. Therefore, they looked at groups of people who remained in the working class or poverty for generation after generation as genetically deficient or deprived and imposed White-centered curricula in which the English language was the sole language of academics while criminalizing students for using their home languages at school.

White middle-class norms in education, ethnocentrism, and hidden curriculum are examples of the dominant narratives affecting Muslim students' education. Instead of using the educational system to turn Muslim students into a carbon copy of the majority White middle class, schools should seek ways to explore, honor, and develop Muslim students' cultural practices. In addition, Alim & Paris (2017) advocate for applying culturally sustaining pedagogies to support minoritized students, as culturally sustaining pedagogies call for schools to be spaces where diverse, heterogeneous practices are valued and sustained instead of being oppressive, homogenizing forces.

Sadly, many Muslim students experience the effects of ethnocentrism at their schools, which is defined by Martusewicz et al. (2021) as "the idea that some people or groups of people are naturally superior to others" (p. 64). They feel insignificant and inferior to the majority White dominant culture. Therefore, Muslim students end up between two choices: either resist the circumstances surrounding them to preserve their identities and keep the connections with their roots or assimilate to the dominant cultural norms. Alim & Paris (2017) add that the problem here is the colonial logic, assimilate-or-fail ideology, narrow definitions of success.

The hidden curriculum is another example of the dominant narrative affecting education. It refers to "the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school" (edglossary.org, 2020). Some examples of the hidden curriculum in schools today are cultural expectations, values, perspectives, topics, teaching strategies, school structure, and institutional rules.

Personal Background Connection

As a learner, I grew up in Egypt in homogeneous classrooms from kindergarten to college, however, pursuing postgraduate studies in the U.S. was a completely different learning experience. I felt that everyone in the room was exceptional and rich in culture and beliefs. Learning with students of different cultures and backgrounds gave me a unique, eye-opening experience that added to my personality and shaped me as an educator.

As a Muslim immigrant living in the U.S., a teacher of color, and a student of color, I feel the importance of being culturally responsive to my students and their families. Nevertheless, I cannot help noticing how Muslim students and their families are marginalized and pretty much voiceless in the educational process. As growing members of minority students, Muslim students bring a wealth of linguistic and cultural experiences to classrooms. However, the educational system refuses to look at that wealth and pushes them to assimilate with the majority, White students, through a White-centered curriculum and pedagogy. Failure to address Muslim students' needs has resulted in a negative school experience, leading to an identity crisis and increased dropouts.

As I am composing this capstone project, I put my nieces and nephews, who were born in the U.S. and will grow up, God Willing, to be the future Muslim American leaders, my students, and all the future generations of Muslim American students at the center of my focus. I hope and pray that soon comes the day when educators take this capstone project as a guide to inspire them. My intention for this project is to help educators develop strategies to validate the cultural identities of their students, identify and build upon their strengths, and address their individual needs.

Interest in The Issue And Core Beliefs About Education

As an educator, I acknowledge that culture is a "dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives and the lives of others. In short, culture shapes every aspect of learning and development" (Heineke & McTighe, 2018, p.53). I strive to support and empower all my students academically and socially by developing a sense of belonging, significance, and fun. Therefore, my research project will focus on developing culturally responsive professional development materials. As an educator, I feel responsible for providing such opportunities for fellow educators to help them understand the need for being culturally responsive to better address the needs of their Muslim students and all their minoritized students.

I believe that all students can learn and achieve their goals if they receive the proper support. Nowadays, classrooms are composed of heterogeneous groups from various cultures and backgrounds. As an educator, I understand the importance of knowing my students, personally and academically, so I can build on their strengths and address their needs. The best way to learn about students is through connecting with their

families. Therefore, creating opportunities to get to know my students and their families while challenging my personal biases and prejudices are essential.

Summary

My research question is, ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** In Chapter One, I have provided some background, context, and rationale for my research. I have identified Muslim students as a growing culturally and linguistically diverse minority in today's classrooms. I have also identified culturally responsive instruction as a great tool to address Muslim students' needs. Moreover, I have shed some light on the history of minoritized students in the U.S. educational system and some dominant narratives that affect Muslim students, like ethnocentrism and hidden curricula.

In Chapter Two, I plan to discuss, in detail, some essential cultural and religious practices that shape the identities of Muslim students and how, by understanding these unique practices, teachers can accommodate their Muslim students and address their needs. In Chapter Three, I will describe the project and the research rationale of the framework I will use to answer my research question. I will also explain the setting where the project will be used, the audience who will benefit from the project, the measurement method to assess the effectiveness of the project, and the project timeline. Finally, Chapter Four will include an analysis and synthesis of the results obtained in this research project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In this chapter, I will shed light on some of the literature review related to my research question, ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** I will seek the answers to this research question by discussing four main subtopics: First, I will discuss the history of Islam and Muslims in America, and I will include some elaborated points on the importance of knowledge seeking in Islam, Islamophobia; and the influence of media on Muslims worldwide. Second, I will discuss some significant challenges Muslim students face in U.S. schools, like school curricula, hidden curriculum, teachers' ethnocentrism, home-school relations, and instruction methods. Third, I will define culturally-sustaining pedagogies from different perspectives and highlight the impact they can create on Muslim students' education. Finally, I will address some significant points regarding Muslim students' cultural and religious needs, like accommodating the daily prayers and Friday prayers, fasting in Ramadan, Islamic holidays, dietary needs, modesty in Islam and wearing the Hijab, and gender separation.

Background about Islam and Muslim Students' Beliefs

According to Alghorani (2003), the word Islam perfectly represents what this religion is all about.

> The Arabic root of the word Islam is 'Salama,' and it has two meanings. First, it means "to submit"; hence, Islam is the total submission to the Will of Allah. Second, it means "peace"; hence, Islam is to establish peace all over the creation of Allah. (Alghorani, 2003, p.7)

Alghorani (2003) further explains that putting the two meanings together makes the reader understand that if the person submits their will to Allah, God Almighty, by obeying His orders, then that person shall reach the true meaning of living in peace.

Haynes (1998) agrees with Alghorani (2003) and further adds that Islam means peace through submission to God, and a Muslim submits to God's will. Haynes notes that Muslims recognize a continuous line of prophets and revelations, beginning with Adam and extending through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, ending with Muhammad (peace and blessings upon all of them) as the last prophet, who completed God's message to humankind. He adds that the Qur'an is the sacred scripture of Islam, which Muslims hold to be the literal word of God revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the angel Gabriel (peace be upon him).

Moreover, Haynes (1998) describes that the role of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) goes beyond being the means for humans to receive God's revelation since Muslims view him as the role model who sets the perfect example of applying the Qur'an to one's life and living a guided life based on the teachings of God. Therefore, the Qur'an (the source of principles) and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (the source of practices) are the two sources of guidance to Muslims and what they adhere to. Muslims get the rulings from these two sources about how to worship God, build family relationships, make social, financial, and dietitian decisions, and more. Hoot et al. (2003) add that since Islam is a religion that is embraced by a very diverse group of people who belong to various cultures, backgrounds, and political interests, Muslims, who do not have proper religious knowledge, may vary in the application of specific Islamic laws depending on their cultures or personal preferences.

Elbih (2015) defines Islam and Muslims as follows:

"Muslims believe in the religion Islam, which states that Allah is the only God and the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His messenger. Islamic doctrine is built on the belief in the oneness of Allah, the prophets of Islam (beginning with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus), the Holy Scriptures (including the Qur'an), Judgment Day, Qadar (predestined fate), and angels (Haque, 2004). The rituals that a Muslim must follow include daily prayers, annual fasting (Ramadan), giving alms to the poor, and the pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca."(Elbih, 2015, p.2)

Elbih (2015) further explains that Muslim ethics are based on good treatment of self, family, other Muslims, non-Muslims, the world, and the creatures within it. Shariah Law (Islamic Law) governs the individual and society in an Islamic community. Muslims living in non-Muslim societies are expected to follow the local government unless asked to do something that contradicts their faith. They should refrain in this case without causing a disturbance. The percentage of Muslims living in Arabic-speaking countries is only 20%. In terms of the Muslim population, Indonesia is the largest country.

History of Islam in America

Many researchers emphasize the existence of Islam in the Americas during the pre-Columbian era. Zerara and Maameri (2017) are among the researchers who extensively researched the presence of Muslims in pre-Columbian America. They share evidence that Muslims from West Africa and Spain arrived in the Americas at least 500 years before Christopher Columbus and spoke of the Muslims' expeditions in the Atlantic

Ocean between the 9th and the 15th centuries. One of the resources they mention is a controversial book entitled *Africa and the Discovery of America,* issued in 1920 by a renowned American historian and linguist, Leo Weiner of Harvard University. In his book, Weiner sought to prove that Columbus was well aware of the African and Muslim presence in the Americas. He supported his claims with linguistic, agricultural, and cultural evidence based on his research on the Native American people and the writings of the early European explorers.

Moreover, through archaeological and linguistic pieces of evidence, Zerara and Maameri (2017) emphasize that not only Muslims from Spain and West Africa reached the Americas in the pre-Columbian era, but they also highlight the Muslims' significant impact on the indigenous population of the Caribbean, Central, South, and North American territories, including Canada, where they traded and intermarried with Iroquois and Algonquin Indians.

Regarding the existence of Muslims in the pre-Columbian era, Hoot et al. (2003) mention that as early as the 1500s, Muslims from Spain who excelled at Maritime navigation and trade arrived in America. It was not until 200 years later that African Muslims were brought into slavery. Haynes (1998) also emphasizes that archival materials indicate that many enslaved people brought to the Americas were Muslims. Abraham (2020) adds that most enslaved Africans came from countries known today as Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, which all have substantial Muslim populations. Therefore, undoubtedly, many of the enslaved Africans were Muslims. Abraham further explains that while they were enslaved in the Americas, most of them would lose their religion or be forbidden from practicing it, but some enslaved people still practiced Islam.

Muslims were estimated to be between 15 and 30% of enslaved people from western and central Africa brought to the Americas.

Alkhateeb (2017) discusses how the enslaved Muslims in the Americas had their unique difficulties and challenges in addition to the suffering the enslaved non-Muslims had at the hands of their enslavers. It was tough for them to practice their religion, as convincing their owners to take a break five times daily to perform their obligatory prayers was difficult. Traveling to Mecca to perform Hajj (pilgrimage) was next to impossible. Seeking Islamic knowledge and learning the Qur'an were limited to whatever knowledge some of them had before they were kidnapped. The scholars and the learned among them tried their best to educate the rest. Some of them could secure imported Qur'an in return for extra working hours to maintain their Islamic identities. Due to the emphasis on secular and religious knowledge seeking in Islam, many enslaved African Muslims were educated, in some cases, equally or even more educated than their enslavers. In some cases, their higher level of education enabled them to work in less demanding jobs like accounting or managing the plantations, which enabled them to organize themselves and lead revolts.

Alkhateeb (2017) notes that throughout time, successive generations of enslaved Muslims inherited less and less of the actual Islamic knowledge and practices. It was almost impossible in the United States to find Muslims with Islamic knowledge by the mid-1800s. By the 1900s, only a few grandchildren of enslaved Muslims remembered their ancestors observing foreign rites different from mainstream Christianity. The descendants of enslaved Muslims regained the memory of Islam in the 20th century. By the 1960s, Muslim leaders such as Malcolm X and W.D. Muhammad restored to African

Americans a mainstream understanding of Islam, which they and their ancestors had lost over the past centuries.

Regarding more recent Muslim immigration to the United States, Hoot et al. (2003) argue that it did not happen until the mid-1990s. They mention that most Muslim immigrants who immigrated during this time have been professionals, businessmen, skilled laborers, and artisans, in contrast to other significant waves of immigrants from Asia and Ireland, who immigrated in the 1800s to fill the need for unskilled and cheap employees. Haynes (1998) reports that the United States saw a substantial influx of Muslims from the Middle East in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, despite discriminatory immigration laws and restrictive travel conditions. The Muslim population of the United States began to grow as immigrants arrived from other Muslim regions, including South Asia, Africa, and Arab countries. Haynes discusses in his article issued in 1998 the estimates of 14% of immigrants entering the United States being Muslims. Undoubtedly the numbers in 2022 are significantly higher. In addition, he mentions that according to the American Muslim Council in Washington, D.C., African Americans who converted to Islam through their families in the 20th century make up as much as 40% of United States Muslims. Over 1,500 mosques and Islamic centers across the country illustrate how this growing Muslim community is adapting to and thriving in the American environment.

Muslims in America

Since the Census Bureau does not collect information on the number of religious groups living in the U.S., there are no government statistics on the number of Muslim Americans (Pew Research, 2017). However, according to research by the Pew Research

Center in 2017, the estimated number of Muslim Americans has reached 3.45 million

people of all ages, including 2.15 million adults. These numbers are projected to reach

8.1 million or 2.1% of the nation's total population by 2050, with a growing rate of

roughly 100,000 annually. This estimate is based on the number of continuous migrations

of Muslims to the United States and the high fertility rate among Muslims, who are

considered younger than the overall U.S. population.

Furthermore, Pew Research (2017) indicates that Muslim Americans are a very

diverse population, with communities that are mainly immigrants or children of

immigrants. They also vary in the way they apply their religion in their daily life. Most

Muslims (65%) say religion is vital in their lives, and about four in ten (42%) say they

pray five times a day. Nevertheless, many others say religion is less important to them

and that they need to be more consistent in performing *salah*, the ritual prayers that

constitute one of the Five Pillars of Islam and are traditionally performed five times daily.

Haynes (1998) emphasizes that practicing their faith in a pluralistic society

presents various challenges for American Muslims, and they are becoming more visible

and organized to overcome these challenges. The 2017 Pew Research survey discusses,

on the one hand, that more than 50% of Muslims in the U.S. report that it has become

increasingly difficult to be Muslim in recent years. They state that they have experienced

at least one incident of discrimination in the past 12 months. In addition, more than half

the U.S. Muslims blame the media coverage of Muslims and Islam in general and

describe it as "unfair." On the other hand, the survey mentions that nearly 50% of U.S.

Muslims say that in the past year, they encountered support and empathy because of their

religion from non-Muslim Americans, and 55% think that Americans, in general, are

friendly. On a positive note, 89% of Muslims say they are proud to be Muslim Americans despite the concerns and challenges they face.

Importance of Knowledge-Seeking to Muslim Families

Salleh (2008) states that Islam has emphasized the importance and value of seeking knowledge ever since its beginning. The fact that the first word of the Qur'an revealed to the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was "Iqra" (Read), and the first few verses of the Qur'an command the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his followers to seek knowledge, as well as multiple verses throughout the Qur'an, make seeking knowledge an obligatory part of being a Muslim. Salleh (2008) adds that the revelation of Surah Al-Alaq could be considered a declaration against illiteracy and encouragement to people, especially Muslims, to seek knowledge as it is the fundamental element of education. Allah The Almighty says in Surat Al-Alaq:

> *Read! In the name of your Lord, who created man out of a mere clot of congealed blood. Read: And your Lord is Most Generous. He Who taught the use of the pen. Taught man that which he knew not. (The Holy Qur'an, Surat Al-Alaq 96:1-5)*

Salleh (2008) comments about the following verse of the Qur'an by saying that if humans want to be recognized in this life and earn high ranks, they should seek knowledge as Allah The Almighty says in Surat Al- Mujadalah:
"Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do." (The Holy Qur'an, Surat Al- Mujadalah 58:11) Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has encouraged knowledge-seeking by saying, *"Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him."* Imam Muslim, Sahih

Muslim, Dar tauq Al-Nijat, 1422h, Hadith (2699). He also said, "*Acquisition of*

knowledge is binding on all Muslims" (both men and women without any discrimination)

Ibn Maja, Sunan Ibn Maja, Dar Ihya AlTurath, Beirut, 1422h, Hadith (224)

Islamophobia

Green (2021) defines Islamophobia as:

The modern word for prejudice that dates back to the Middle Ages, and that

permeates Western societies in the 21st century. It refers to the fear of and

hostility toward Muslims and Islam, as well as the discriminatory, exclusionary,

and violent practices arising from these attitudes that target Muslims and those

perceived as Muslims. Islamophobia is best understood as a form of cultural

racism that instigates animosity based on religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and

ethnicity. (p.1)

Green notes that not long after the 9/11 attacks, the term Islamophobia became a

name for the prejudice experienced by Muslim minority populations in Western nations.

In her research, Brooks (2019) mentions that according to the Pew Research Center, in a

survey of U.S. adults with various religious affiliations in 2017, Muslims were among the

major groups they felt most negatively toward. Many of them thought that many

American Muslims were anti-American. With the increasing suspicion, hatred, and fear

of Islam and Muslims, there has been a significant increase recently in hate crimes

against Muslims. Brooks also mentions a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center

(2017) that states that the number of anti-Muslim hate groups nearly tripled from 34 in

2015 to 101 in 2016 and that the FBI Hate Crime Statistics documented 307 incidents of

anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2016, approximately double the incidents documented in 2014.

Furthermore, Brooks (2019) discusses some tenets of Islamophobia in her research, like the view of Islam as a static, monolithic, and authoritarian religion. She replies to this view with the fact that, in reality, the Muslim community is diverse and dynamic. There is even substantial disagreement among Muslims regarding how Islam should be lived. In addition, she also responds to the view that looks at Islam and Muslims as the "other" who do not belong to the Western culture and disapproves of the idea that Muslims share with the communities they live in the sense of common space, daily human experiences, and ethical principles. In addition, Brooks states that Islamophobia emphasizes the belief that Islam is a primitive, backward religion that has remained static throughout history. There is no recognition in this view of Islam's ideas and practices as being different from, but potentially as valuable as, those of other traditions.

Last but not least, Brooks (2019) notes that Islamophobia is fueled by the belief that Islam is an aggressive enemy to be opposed, feared, and defeated. In this view, Islam is somehow intrinsically violent. This notion ignores the fact that Muslims interpret and enact Islamic principles for peace or violence, just as followers of all other religions do.

Influence of Media on Muslims Worldwide

In her article, Elbih (2015) discusses the importance of addressing Muslim representation in what she calls popular media, referring to movies, TV shows, video games, and news channels. She argues that Muslims are often misrepresented, which fosters ignorance, misunderstanding, and hatred in what Elbih calls "the impressionable

minds and the young" (p. 112). She states that Muslims are usually portrayed as "the bad guys" in popular media who are cruel, fanatic, and violent, or in the best case scenario, if they were "good Muslims," they are worthy of being suspected. Elbih also notes that Hollywood plays a significant role in shaping societies' perceptions of Muslims and Islam, and every new blockbuster fan the flames of Islamophobia. Elbih concludes that this misrepresentation in popular media makes many American politicians believe that Muslim terrorism is the number one problem on Earth, as Bill O'Reilley stated on October 24, 2014, on the Fox News Network.

Said (1993) adds that in addition to communicating official and unofficial state policies, the media visually asserts the enemy and distracts the public from war casualties and cultural imperialism. As a result of the negative image popular media propagates against Muslims, Muslims face discrimination, Muslim students report daily harassment at schools, and women who wear hijab are subject to assaults and cruel remarks.

Elbih (2015) suggests that even though this treatment of Muslims is unacceptable, educators must go beyond treating symptoms and address the underlying causes of fear, hatred, and ignorance. Rather than focusing on the issue itself, educators should address the assumptions made by the media, politics, and misinformed leaders about the issue. In addition, Elbih notes that there is a difference between Arabs and Muslims and that it is important to note that Muslim societies are not homogeneous and monolithic. She emphasizes that the Islamic religion does not teach terrorism; most importantly, for the moment in history where we find ourselves, not all Muslims are terrorists. In addition to recognizing the error of these assumptions, educators must educate their students about the horrific consequences of continuing to hold them. Educators must address these

assumptions within themselves and their students to create a new understanding of Islam in our classrooms.

Summary

Muslim Americans are a very diverse growing population, with communities that are mainly immigrants or children of immigrants. They also vary in the way they apply their religion in their daily life. Many researchers emphasize the existence of Islam in the Americas during the pre-Columbian era, which significantly impacted the indigenous population whom they traded and intermarried with.

Moreover, it is estimated that between 15 and 30% of the enslaved people brought to the Americas from West and Central Africa were Muslims. Throughout time, successive generations of enslaved Muslims inherited less and less of the original Islamic knowledge and practices. By the 1960s, Muslim leaders such as Malcolm X and W.D. Muhammad restored a mainstream understanding of Islam to African Americans. The Muslim population of the United States began to grow as immigrants arrived from other Muslim regions, including South Asia, Africa, and Arab countries. Muslims are often misrepresented in the news and media in general. Consequently, Islamophobia grows due to ignorance, misunderstanding, and hatred toward Muslims, and it continues to grow and spread in different communities.

In the coming section, I will discuss how Islamophobia and biases shape enormous challenges for Muslim students growing up in U.S. schools. I will also discuss different accommodations Muslim students need to preserve their cultural and religious identities to be successful at school.

Challenges Muslim Students Face in U.S. Schools

Even though multicultural education has long documented and addressed the needs of Black and Latino youths and families, Muslim community experiences have only recently been brought to the forefront after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Sabry and Bruna (2007) suggest that there are several challenges facing Muslim students and their families in U.S. schools due to the current political climate. To ensure a positive educational experience, these challenges must be addressed. Muslim students bring to the classroom different perspectives. However, most teachers are ill-equipped to deal with their differences effectively because of misinformation that circulates in the press, popular media, and their own preconceived notions and biases. Sabry and Bruna talk about cultural mismatch theory and how it can be used to understand the experiences of Muslim students and their families as a non-dominant student population. Therefore, they used the cultural mismatch theory to explain Muslim students' curriculum, instruction, and home-school relations challenges. In cultural mismatch theory, academic failure isn't a result of genetic or cultural inferiority but rather a difference between the cultures at school and home.

Curriculum

Sabry and Bruna (2007) claim that some scholars identify the lack of adequate representation of minority history in the conventional curriculum as an important factor in minority students' negative schooling experiences. They support their claim by mentioning Nieto's (2000) belief that school curricula should reflect the history of all the people, including minority groups, who contributed to forming a country's history. Nieto also mentions how students who do not belong to the majority group have difficulty finding themselves and their communities in school curricula. If they see themselves,

they see themselves through the lens of the dominant group. This lens mostly sees stereotypes, myths, and false perceptions. As a result of this distorted view, Muslim students' peers are also influenced by myths, stereotypes, and false images that need to be challenged. Consequently, the Muslim community is often concerned about how Islam is portrayed and incorporated into the curriculum.

Brooks (2019) mentions that scholars have suggested multiple recommendations to improve the quality of teaching about Islam in the social studies curriculum. She also mentioned Moore's (2006) suggestion about how Islam's contributions to human civilization and its relationship with other civilizations and countries should be included in the curriculum on Islam. Moreover, Moore stated that studies of Islam should counter media information that misrepresents Islamic beliefs and practices and perpetuates misconceptions, distortions, and myths. A similar argument was made by Elbih (2015), who suggested that teachers are responsible for helping their students unlearn what the media teaches them about Islam and Muslims and replace these misconceptions with a more complex and informed understanding. According to her, teaching about Islam should address the rise of discrimination and intolerance toward Muslims.

According to Sabry and Bruna's (2007) research study on the challenges Muslim students face in a Midwestern city school in the U.S., inaccuracy and bias were critical themes in Muslim students' curriculum and schooling. Several parents spoke of the misinformation taught to their children at school about Islam. For instance, in reference to the Kaaba, one Muslim parent explained that her son felt embarrassed when a student teacher told them Muslims worship idols. The student did his best to explain that Muslims turn toward the Kaaba when praying, one of the focal points for Islamic

pilgrimage. (The Kaaba is a small stone building in the court of the Great Mosque at Mecca.) Despite the child's efforts, the teacher dismissed what he said, insisting that she was certain of her information. Another Muslim parent described how her son had to correct his teachers when they credited Europeans as the inventors of some historical inventions when the real inventors were Muslim Arabs. According to another mother of a Muslim student, such a curriculum does not provide students with "balanced knowledge." Her son gave the example of an Economics class. Clearly, Muslim students are aware of the inherent privileges of capitalism over alternative economic models, as he explained that students are taught economics from a nationalistic/capitalist perspective.

Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives students learn in school. While the 'formal' curriculum consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities students participate in, as well as the knowledge and skills educators intentionally teach to students, the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are in school. (edglossary.org, 2020)

Siddiqi (2021) adds to the previous definition by saying that, generally speaking, the hidden curriculum refers to what students are expected to do and value in schools without any formal guidance. It is common for students who do not adhere to the hidden curriculum to be disciplined or subjected to microaggressions. It is clear that a teacher who feels inconvenienced by religious dress requirements inadvertently tells students to, simply, follow the crowd.

In addition, Foster (1992) brings up how school curricula do not reflect the cultures of minoritized students, which leads to low self-esteem and a failure to develop their cultural identities and their sense of belonging. Since White, middle-class culture dominates schools, minority students are disadvantaged because they lack the knowledge and skills valued in the school system. Their cultural differences, such as those related to their language, are viewed as deficits, as they are assessed based on this dominant culture.

Moreover, Siddiqi (2021) suggests that the hidden curriculum most benefits people from White, middle-class, and Christian backgrounds. American public schools are dominated by Christian privilege despite their secular intent. Siddiqi gives an example of how the academic calendar follows Christian holidays. Unlike practicing members of other faiths, Christians do not have to choose between celebrating a religious holiday or attending school. Siddiqi mentions other ways in which Christian privilege shows up in schools. For example, she mentions how Christian students can expect many of their teachers to share the same faith as them. Therefore, students and teachers wearing religious symbols at school are neither challenged nor contested.

Furthermore, Easter egg hunts and Christmas gift exchanges seem secular and fun, while other religious celebrations are seldom discussed in school. In addition, Foster (1992) argues that a hidden curriculum exists in a school dominated by a monocultural set of values and behavioral expectations. Despite token gestures to Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam in assembly sessions, he claims that many teachers had minimal knowledge of students' religions and complained about a lack of competition among their students.

As one of the many examples of how the hidden curriculum can affect Muslim students' religious and cultural identities, Shatara (2007) records her experience growing up in U.S. public schools as an Arab Muslim. As early as third grade, she felt that her identity was being erased as it seemed like every minute in school, she was being told how wrong her parents' lives were and how she had to become just like everyone else. In high school, she had to completely assimilate with school norms as she was constantly told how to be and what to do. In college, she repeatedly heard, "You don't have to be like your mother,"; "You're too smart for that,"; "You're in America now, so no one tells you what to do" (p. 50). She realized as she grew up that many of her teachers pushed her to give up important aspects of her identity. She believed her teachers had her best interests at heart and wanted her to succeed. However, their view of success meant rejecting her parents, culture, and religion.

Teachers and Instruction Methods

Sabry and Bruna (2007) discuss how teachers may need to adjust their instructional methods to achieve a more collective orientation and create a classroom participation system that supports Muslim students and all students of color. Sabry and Bruna suggest that due to conscious or unconscious prejudices and biases, some teachers may not give the same amount of attention, time, and feedback they would usually give to students from the dominant group to Muslim students, which affects students psychologically and academically. For instance, Siddiqi (2021) mentions in her research how female students reported that teachers treated them differently when they started wearing the hijab, and they felt they could no longer ask those teachers for academic help.

Sabry and Bruna (2007) confirm that among the participants in their study, there was a significant theme of insensitivity and unawareness concerning the instruction and education of Muslim students. Muslim students and parents expressed discontent toward teachers who could not conceal their biases on different topics. Educators' own opinions often had an impact on what they taught students. One of their study participants reports that during a discussion about the Middle East, their social studies teacher said, "This is a region of peace haters." This statement greatly embarrassed the student, and he worried his non-Muslim peers would perceive him the same way.

Furthermore, another Muslim parent participant in Sabry and Bruna's study (2007) gave an example of how some teachers do not accommodate Muslim students' needs in instruction due to a lack of understanding of Islamic values and teaching. She gave an example in physical education class where the teacher failed to accommodate a Muslim girl student when she told her teacher she could not participate in the swimming class for religious reasons. Instead of providing other opportunities to practice an alternative and equivalent sport, the teacher told the students to walk around the pool, making her feel that she was punished and humiliated in front of her peers.

Teacher Ethnocentrism

Foster (1992) discusses teacher ethnocentrism and a model of the ideal teacher. He suggests that teachers who strive to achieve equal treatment among their students should give equal recognition, respect, and value to the different cultures their classrooms embrace. Here, equality is based on valuing all ethnic norms equally and avoiding devaluing and labeling them as deviant in any way. Therefore, since students come from different cultural backgrounds with different values and norms, expecting them to

conform to the same mainstream behavior norms may be inappropriate. He gives two examples of how teachers can strictly apply monocultural ideas about acceptable school behavior. The first example is when teachers look at Muslim girls wearing hijabs over their heads or tights/pants under their skirts to cover their bodies as out-of-school uniforms. The second example he gives is not allowing students of color to speak their home languages while playing in the school playground.

Furthermore, Foster (1992) argues that many teachers have been criticized for treating ethnically and/or racially diverse students less favorably than their majority group peers, violating their fundamental right to equal opportunity. Some of the inequalities of treatment he mentions are the negative, stereotyped views and low academic expectations some teachers may have toward minoritized students. He gives an example of how Afro/Caribbean students, many of whom are Muslims, felt inferior in the classroom as they were more likely to be assigned to low-status groups in the school where their educational opportunities were restricted.

Foster (1992) suggests that teachers should value their students' cultural differences and adjust their expectations and practices to address them. He also calls for a balance between being culturally sensitive towards students' different cultures and being too nervous about being labeled as racist or ethnocentric if they question their students' behavior or hold them accountable to certain standards of behavior or work. Teachers need to develop relevant expectations that honor the different cultures in their classrooms and stem from justifiable societal and educational values.

Home-School Relations

Sabry and Bruna (2007) discuss how home-school relations can cause a cultural mismatch among Muslim students since, from one side, families and communities pressure students to present a positive image of themselves as proud Muslims while, from the other side, teachers and administrators pressure them to abide by school rules and expectations that in many cases may contradict with their cultural and religious identities. With their teachers' support and understanding, it would be easier for students to fulfill their religious obligations, such as fasting, praying, observing dress codes, and Islamic values. A lack of understanding could create a rift between U.S. public schools and Muslim homes. To build effective communication about such obligations between home and school, Sabry and Bruna highlight the role of social workers and school counselors and the importance of involving Muslim parents in public schools. The interviews they conducted with Muslim parents and non-Muslim educators showed the dissatisfaction both parents and educators have about home and school relations and described it as uncooperative and passive.

Sabry and Bruna (2007) offer several suggestions to improve Muslim students' schooling and build a positive relationship between school and homes, such as holding mini-conferences between Muslim parents and teachers at the beginning of the school year, providing written brochures to teachers explaining the needs of Muslim students, and promoting the participation of Muslim parents on school boards and other school-related events.

Summary

Researchers suggest that there are several challenges facing Muslim students and their families in U.S. schools due to the current political climate. In the previous section,

I discussed some significant challenges Muslim students face in U.S. schools, like school curricula, hidden curriculum, teachers' ethnocentrism, home-school relations, and instruction methods. To ensure a positive educational experience, these challenges must be addressed. Muslim students bring to the classroom different perspectives. However, most teachers are ill-equipped to deal with their differences effectively because of misinformation that circulates in the press, popular media, and their own preconceived notions and biases. In the coming section, I will illustrate culturally-sustaining pedagogies along with their different names and definitions and how educators can use such pedagogical strategies to validate and affirm Muslim students' cultural and religious needs so they can build them academically and socially to bridge them to academic success.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

According to Hollie (2018), over the past 50 years, multiple names and definitions have been given to culturally responsive teaching. These variations include, among others, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally compatible teaching, culturally relevant teaching, culturally connected teaching, culturally responsive learning, culturally matched teaching, cultural proficiency, cultural competency, and culturally appropriate teaching. Hollie notes that Paris and Alim (2017) introduced another term, *culturally sustaining pedagogy*. According to Paris and Alim (2017),

> Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) seeks to perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions Dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining

whole rather than framed as broken, and as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. CSP exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities that have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. (p.1)

Paris and Alim (2017) believe that CSP offers alternative visions of schooling where diversity and heterogeneity are valued and sustained rather than the oppressive homogenizing forces currently existing in U.S. schools. CSP responds to the fact that schools are being used as an extension of the colonial project. Therefore, CSP aims to disrupt the powerful anti-indigeneity, anti-blackness, and related anti-brownness myths that are foundational to education in the United States and many other colonial nations.

Moreover, Paris and Alim (2017) explain that a key factor emphasized by the CSP is the importance of schooling as a site for sustaining communities of color's cultural ways of being. CSP highly values multiculturalism and multilingualism as educational change agents for students, teachers, and other educators. As a result of utilizing cultural references, CSP gives students a sense of empowerment intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. Additionally, it encourages teachers to hold high expectations for students and recognize social inequalities' causes and realities.

In addition, Paris and Alim (2017) emphasize that for CSP to be effective, young people's cultural identities, academic investments, and critiques of White middle-class values must be supported in collaborative, constructive, critical, and loving environments. Youth heritage practices and community engagements must be honored and examined in such environments and provided with opportunities and power.

"To do this, we must work to combat and eradicate oppressive, racist educational policies that advantage monoculturalism, that debase the linguistic virtuosities of communities of color, and that recode terms such as *relevance* and *responsiveness* to mark tolerance over acceptance, normalization over difference, demonization over humanization and hate over love." (Paris & Alim, 2017, p.29)

In addition to Paris and Alim's definition and work in CSP, Hollie (2018) mentions some pioneers in the field of CSP in his book. For example, he mentions Gloria Ladson-Billings and describes her book as "the star in the culturally responsive universe" (p.26). She defines culturally responsive teaching as: "A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes" (p.26). He also mentions Geneva Gay's work and describes her book as "the second most influential work on culturally responsive teaching" (p.26). She defines culturally responsive pedagogy as "the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to, and effective for, them." (Gay, 2000, p. 31).

Finally, Hollie (2018) defines cultural and linguistic responsiveness as "the validation and affirmation of indigenous home culture and language for building and bridging the students to succeed in the culture of Academia and mainstream Society" (Hollie, 2018, p.27). He uses the term 'VABB' to refer to 'validation, affirmation, building, and bridging' (Hollie, 2018, p.27) and defines each of them as follows:

- **Validation** is the process of intentionally and purposely legitimizing the home culture and language of the student. Through historical institutional and structural

racism, stereotypes, and generalizations, primarily carried through the mainstream media, such validation has traditionally been delegitimized. By constantly describing students as rude, insubordinate, defiant, disrespectful, disruptive, unmotivated, and lazy, school institutions invalidate students. Gradually, these labels diminish students' cultural and linguistic values in school. When students are validated, a counter-narrative is presented, telling them explicitly that they are not these labels as they are just being misunderstood for cultural and linguistic reasons.

- **Affirmation** is the intentional and purposeful effort to challenge negative stereotypes, images, and representations of marginalized cultures and languages promoted by corporate mainstream media, such as music, film, and television. Many of the messages are subtle and are woven into instructional materials, textbooks, and how the internet is used in schools. By providing images, texts, and narratives that allow students to analyze media critically and give them alternate perspectives, affirmation is achieved.

- **Building** is the intentional effort educators make to understand and recognize students' cultural and linguistic behaviors and use those behaviors to foster rapport and relationships with the students.

- **Bridging** is providing students with academic and social skills that will help them succeed beyond the classroom. A successful bridging occurs when students can navigate school and mainstream culture effectively.

Summary

In the previous section, I defined culturally sustaining pedagogies from different perspectives and highlighted the impact they can create on Muslim students' education. For CSP to be effective, young people's cultural identities, academic investments, and critiques of White middle-class values must be supported in collaborative, constructive, critical, and loving environments. Based on Hollie's definition of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, educators must validate and affirm Muslim students' cultural and religious identities to build positive relations with students and their families and bridge students to academic success.

In the coming section, I will shed some light on cultural and religious aspects that Muslim students need their teachers and schools to validate and affirm in order for students to reach their full academic potential.

Addressing Muslim Students' Cultural and Religious Needs

In his book, Engaging Muslim Students in Public Schools, Abraham (2020) discusses in detail the right of Muslim students to practice their religion in public schools, how this practice may look like, and how schools have the responsibility to accommodate their religious needs under the free expression clause of the First Amendment. It is often the case that Muslim families and schools are in tension when the schools cannot provide the accommodations they require, either latently or explicitly. Muslim children will take this to mean that they are not welcome in school and, perhaps, by extension, in Western society. This feeling can significantly affect Muslim students both personally and psychologically. By accommodating Islamic practices and letting Muslim students know there is no harm in observing religious practices at school, being a Muslim in public schools could become much easier.

In fact, Siddiqi (2021) mentions in her research how some of the student participants emphasized that their Muslim identity served as a protective factor for them while in school as they kept reminding themselves of academic intentions through a religious lens, which meant to them that practicing their religion somehow motivated them and made them more successful academically. As a result, these young people, their communities, and society can reap numerous benefits. However, teachers must be aware of the practical aspects of observing religious practices. They can effectively accommodate them only if they consider their school's context.

Haynes (1998) explains that many Muslims attending public schools may express their desire to adhere to certain religious principles or fulfill certain religious requirements. While many Muslim children are taught and perform various duties at an earlier age, they become fully accountable for fulfilling their religious obligations when they reach puberty. Students and parents can satisfy many religious needs on their own initiative. The school's primary role is to create an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for individual choice.

Daily Prayers

According to Abraham (2020), the most considerable religious accommodation needed for Muslim students and families is the *Salah*, the five daily prayers. In order to adequately accommodate prayer, educators must have a thorough understanding of it. The proper accommodation must take into account time, place, duration, and the necessary prayer requirements like performing ablution, which is called *Wudu*, or preparatory ritual washing. Prayer is the center of everything in the Muslim world. Unlike other Muslim children, Western Muslim children are under enormous psychological pressure to perform

the prayers while advocating for the prayers' accommodation entirely on their own as most likely they were raised by parents who did not have to advocate for themselves growing up, so they may lack the skill to teach the students to self-advocate effectively.

As Abraham (2020) points out, schools could make their biggest mistake by allowing students too much freedom when offering time to pray without proper supervision and establishing expectations for how they should use their time. Sending students with zero or minimal supervision could set students up for failure as they can get easily sidetracked or misuse the situation to avoid school work. Supervision should be at least as expected in any given classroom. School staff members must not, and should not, be hesitant or shy about supervising students during prayer for fear of making students uncomfortable. In fact, as long as a male adult supervises boys and a female adult supervises girls, there should be no issue.

Abraham (2020) further explains that Islamic prayer times fluctuate throughout the year, just as the duration of daylight varies throughout the year and seasons. It is primarily the noon prayer that students have to perform during school hours, although Asr (the afternoon prayer) can be performed at other times as well, especially during the winter months. Educators can look up prayer times online to develop a schedule for the future. It is a common practice for families and mosques to do the prayers within 20 to 30 minutes of the beginning time. Students who pray, therefore, are accustomed to praying earlier in the timeframe because the reward is greater if the prayer is offered earlier. Schools should accommodate students who want to pray *dhuhr*, the noon prayer, in school, even when the time frame extends beyond the end of the school day. Haynes

(1998) suggests allowing students to perform their prayers in a designated empty room on campus during lunchtime or breaks.

Friday Congregational Prayer (Salat-ul-Jumu'ah)

Abdel Hamid (2021) explains that the Qur'an emphasizes the significance of Friday as a sacred day of worship in a chapter called "*Al-Jumu'ah*" (the day of the congregation); Muslims call Friday *Jumu'ah* in Arabic. Allah, God Almighty, says in this chapter, "*O you who believe! When you are called to the Friday congregational prayers, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off your business. That is better for you if you knew (what is best for you).*" (The Qur'an, Friday Chapter). Haynes (1998) adds that the Friday prayer, which takes 30 to 45 minutes to complete, usually takes place around students' lunch hour. Therefore, he recommends allocating space on campus for students to pray on Friday and allowing students to leave campus to attend the prayer at the local masjid (mosque) and return when done.

Abraham (2020) gives a further explanation by saying that since Friday prayers require a sermon that should be done by a Muslim male who has passed the age of puberty, schools may have a list of guests whom they may invite on Fridays to lead the prayers and give the sermon, or coach some of the high schoolers to do so. Students find it a great leadership opportunity that requires practice and mentoring. It is essential to mention here that Muslim staff members cannot lead the prayers or give the sermon due to first amendment restrictions. Another accommodation Abraham (2020) mentions is having a short day on Friday in which students have early dismissal at noon, enabling them to attend the prayer at a local masjid.

Fasting Ramadan

Haynes (1998) explains that Muslims abstain from food and drink during Ramadan (a lunar month of 29 or 30 days) from dawn to sunset. In Arabic, this duty is called *sawm*. It is common for Muslim students to observe the fast. Fasting will prevent them from participating in meals or refreshments during the daylight hours. Additionally, they will be unable to engage in heavy physical activity during this period. Muslim students should be allowed to spend lunchtime in a study hall or library instead of a cafeteria during Ramadan fasting. As Ramadan approaches, physical education teachers should provide alternatives to rigorous exercise.

Hoot et al. (2003) add that the Islamic lunar calendar features Ramadan as its ninth month. Muslims fast from dawn to sunset throughout this month (health and age permitting). This annual fast is held to develop gratitude, reaffirm responsibility towards the hungry, and develop self-control. Young children sometimes choose to follow their parents in fasting, although the practice is not obligatory before puberty. Culturally responsive teachers provide a separate area for children who choose to fast while other children have snacks or lunch.

Abraham (2020) brings up a few considerations for teachers and schools. First, Ramadan is the ninth month in the lunar calendar; therefore, it does not come at the same time every year. While a few years back, Ramadan used to be observed in the summertime, as of 2023, Ramadan is expected to start on the 24th of March. This means that daytime fasting is getting shorter in the coming few years. Second, it is a great idea for the schools that wish to be more culturally responsive to host a community dinner during *Iftar* time, the time when Muslims break their fast at sunset. That would be a great chance for school community building and an excellent chance for families to share their

cultural food and practices during this month. Third, educators must understand that Muslim students' schedule changes significantly during Ramadan since they are highly encouraged to fast during the daytime and attend the night prayers at the masjid at night. The night prayer tends to be longer during the last ten days of Ramadan. This means that Muslim students will go to school fasting and have only a couple of hours to sleep.

Some of the recommendations Abraham (2020) suggests are offering quiet time or nap time for 15-20 minutes at midday to help students recharge and focus on what is left from the day and surveying to take families' input about changing the time in Ramadan to offer either an early release or late arrival. In addition, he suggests scheduling school testing as early as possible in the morning and flipping their morning and afternoon schedule every other day, so that morning instruction is evened out amongst classes.

Islamic Holidays

Haynes (1998) explains the two major religious holidays for Muslims during the year. The first is a three-day festival called Eid al-Fitr (Festival of Ending the Fast), the celebration after Ramadan. The second one is a four-day festival called *Eid al-Adha* (Festival of the Sacrifice), which is the celebration that takes place during the *Hajj or* Muslim pilgrimage. Muslims are highly encouraged to wear their best attire and head to their local masjid or the designated site in the morning to attend Eid prayers on the day of *Eid* and listen to *Khutbatul Eid* or the Eid sermon. When the sermon ends, Muslims celebrate, share meals, and exchange gifts.

In the same way Christmas and Easter are important to Christians and Hanukkah and Passover are important to Jews, these Muslim holidays are equally crucial to

Muslims. Like Ramadan, Eid is celebrated according to the Islamic lunar calendar and occurs roughly eleven days earlier than the standard Gregorian calendar. Schools can look up the internet for information on the *Eid* dates each year. One of the suggestions Haynes (1992) makes to accommodate Muslim students during Eid celebrations is to grant them excused absences to participate in Islam's two major religious holidays. Moreover, he discourages scheduling standardized testing or exams on these holidays and demands that teachers allow students to make up important assignments.

Furthermore, Hoot et al. (2003) bring up important considerations for many Muslim families who may have serious reservations regarding common holiday celebrations in the U.S. of pagan origin, such as Halloween and Valentine's Day. It might not bother some families to expose their children to those of other religions and cultures as long as the Islamic holidays such as Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha are also introduced to them. Various alternative programs should be offered to parents whose children do not wish to participate in such holidays, related school activities, or school programs.

Dietary Needs

Hoot et al. (2003) discuss how the Qur'an categorizes food into haram (forbidden) and halal (permissible). All pork-based products, alcohol, and any food containing mono-diglycerides or gelatin are forbidden to Muslims. Therefore, schools should provide Muslim parents with information regarding the ingredients of lunches served at school. Teachers and adults serving the food should also understand how food preparation and serving may pose potential problems if they are not paying attention to simple things like not using the same utensils that touch pork or pork products before serving Muslim children and making sure that the snacks they are passing out to Muslim

children do not contain pork or pork products. Abdel Hamid (2021) adds that according to the 14th Amendment, Muslims are entitled to the same religious dietary protections as people of other religions. These accommodations should apply to all religious groups, not just Muslims; otherwise, the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause is violated.

Modesty in Islam, Wearing the Hijab, and Gender Separation

Muslims believe that Allah, God Almighty, orders in the Qur'an the believing men and women to be modest in the way they interact with each other, which sets the guidelines for their behavior when interacting with each other, and their outfits, including the command for Muslim women to cover their bodies and wear the *Hijab*. This is explained in the following verse from the Qur'an in Suratu An-Nour, in which God says:

> *"Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do.(24:30)And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful." (The Holy Qur'an, Surat An-Nour 24:30-31)*

In addition to being modest by wearing the Hijab, Muslim women wear the hijab as a way of identifying themselves as Muslims to the communities they live in, as explained in the following verse from the Qur'an in Suratu Al-Ahzab:

"O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful." (*The Holy Qur'an,* Surat Al-Ahzab 33:59)

Alghorani (2003) explains how Muslim women are commanded to cover all their bodies in loose outfits, including the head, whenever they leave their homes once they reach puberty. Muslim women choose different types and styles to cover themselves as long as they are mindful of the Islamic dress code's principles. He adds that such dress codes may cause some limitations in performing some activities if they are not accommodated. They also may trigger biases and stereotypes against Muslim women in Western societies.

Isik-Ercan (2015), who focused her research on Turkish Muslim students, adds that it was common for Turkish children, especially girls, to be the center of attention when they wore modest clothes at school, such as headscarves, which gained negative attention after 9/11 and carried stereotypical connotations about Muslim women being oppressed regardless of all the studies that show how girls and women perceive the hijab as an intentional and free choice that empowers them. She gives an example of an eighth-grader participant in her research who emphasized that she consciously chose to wear the headscarf in seventh grade to practice further modesty and make her religious

identity visible. She perceives wearing the hijab as a great responsibility to be that visible and be seen as representative of her religion.

> I wanted to wear the headscarf because when people looked at me, they didn't know I am Muslim. I could not be open about myself. I love wearing my headscarf. People know I'm Muslim, and I like it, I'm proud of it. But since I began wearing the headscarf, I feel like I took on a heavy responsibility. For instance, let's say I did something people do not like. They could immediately say, 'So Muslims are like this.' Because of that, I try to be more careful with my life and my actions. (p. 241)

Hoot et al. (2003) discuss how several Muslims interviewed saw religious restrictions regarding gender mixing as an important issue in public schools, especially after puberty. As a result of these concerns, most Muslim children prefer to shower in individually enclosed compartments, change rooms with private changing compartments, and have swimming and physical education classes separate from the opposite gender because of their comfort level. Additionally, Muslim children are required from a very young age to wash their private parts after using the bathroom. For children to fulfill these standards of personal hygiene as a religious requirement during the school day, schools need to ensure that this is possible. Educators may find more assistance in understanding these religious traditions through parents who are willing to assist their children's teachers with understanding and assisting this religious tradition, as well as Islamic cultural centers or specialized collections at public libraries in urban areas with a large Muslim population.

In the end, Siddiqi (2021) emphasizes the importance of educators recognizing the identities of their Muslim students and the ways they may contribute to the propagation of hegemonic ideals within their classrooms. In many cases, Muslim students believe their American identity and their Muslim identity are at odds, which can be frustrating for them to balance between both. Moreover, social pressure from teachers and peers can harm Muslim students' self-image. In general, Muslim students bring unique skills to the classroom that assist them in succeeding academically. However, harassment and bullying by peers and administrators, in some cases, can have a negative effect on students' well-being. It is, therefore, important for teachers to be aware of their own biases and how they express them in the classroom. Muslim students must also be approached from a positive, knowledge-based perspective, and cooperation must be maintained when they request accommodations based on their religious beliefs.

Summary

Muslim students have the right to practice their religion in public schools. Schools have the responsibility to accommodate their religious needs under the free expression clause of the First Amendment. In the past section, I addressed some major points regarding Muslim students' cultural and religious needs like accommodating the daily prayers; Friday prayers; fasting in Ramadan; Islamic holidays; dietary needs; modesty in Islam and wearing the Hijab; and gender separation. I discussed multiple ways teachers can be culturally responsive to address Muslim students' needs and guide them to academic success.

Project Rationale

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two focused on highlighting the challenges Muslim students face in the U.S. school system. As a Muslim American educator, I intend to bridge the gap between Muslim families and schools through this humble effort to build bridges of understanding and communication between Muslim homes and schools away from biases and discrimination. Muslim students, and any student who does not belong to the majority group, face multiple challenges as they strive to navigate the system while preserving their cultural and religious identities. That is why in this research, I tried to reclaim the voice of Muslim children who are forced, by all means, to give up their identities and assimilate into the mainstream. I genuinely believe that when students get the chance to connect with their roots and who they truly are, they will be more successful academically and socially, and they will help themselves, their families, and their communities be successful as well.

As a Muslim American educator, I invite all educators, including myself, to examine our biases and make genuine efforts to learn about our students' personal, cultural, and religious differences to identify their strengths, build on them, and address their needs.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I examined some literature reviews regarding my research question, ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** I started the chapter by setting up the background information about Islam, the history of Muslims in the U.S., and their core beliefs so the reader can understand the history and background of Muslim students. Then I highlighted some challenges Muslim students face in the U.S. school systems and

discussed how educators could utilize culturally responsive approaches to address these challenges and help them reach their full academic potential.

Chapter Three Preview

Chapter Three describes my methods which explain how this project will be completed. Chapter Three describes the project and my framework for answering the research question. As a second step, I will provide a research rationale for selecting one framework over another. The third step is identifying my project audience (who will benefit from the project's work) and setting (where it will be primarily used). Then, I will determine the measurements that will be used to assess the effectiveness of the project and a timeline for project completion. Finally, in Chapter Four, I will provide a critical reflection on the results obtained in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Chapter Three focuses on the project's two major pieces: culturally responsive instruction and Muslim students' cultural and religious needs. In this project, I attempt to find answers to my research question: ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** The project aims at developing a one-week professional development during the teachers' in-service week in August.

Chapter Three includes a description of the project, a research rationale of the framework I used to answer my research question, the setting where the project will be used, the audience who will benefit from the project, the measurement method to assess the effectiveness of the project, and the project timeline.

Description of the Project

In the previous two chapters, I have presented my research question, the personal and professional reasons for choosing to cover culturally-responsive instruction, and how it can be beneficial to address Muslim students' needs. My final product is a one-week professional development during teachers' in-service week before school starts, targeting non-Muslim educators who interact with Muslim students throughout the school year. In addition to offering practical solutions and answers, the literature covered in my professional development would also be an academic resource for stakeholders with similar concerns. I will build this professional development on the accommodations mentioned in the literature review I did in Chapter Two.

Project Framework

I have built my professional development project on the work of

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), where they look at effective practices for professional

development. They emphasize that effective professional development should be

structured professional learning that changes teacher practices and improves student

learning outcomes. They identify seven characteristics of effective PD, which states that

the PD must be content focused; incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning

theory; supports collaboration, typically in job-embedded contexts; uses models and

modeling of effective practice; provides coaching and expert support; offers opportunities

for feedback and reflection; and is of sustained duration.

To follow this framework, I made sure that the PD is content focused by giving

real examples subject teachers can follow to be more culturally responsive to Muslim

students. For example, in language classes, be it English language arts or foreign

language, I encouraged teachers to compare the grammar and vocabulary of the language

being taught to Muslim students' home languages or the other languages they are familiar

with. That way, teachers will validate and affirm their languages and build relationships

to help them bridge students to success.

In addition, in social studies and history classes, I provided teachers with

resources and activities that helped them connect students' Islamic heritage and history to

the content being taught. In math and science classes, I invited teachers to elaborate on

the Muslim scholars and pioneers throughout history who have contributed significantly

to building the civilization of our modern life. In physical education classes, I have

focussed on how teachers can be culturally responsive to Muslim students' needs to dress modestly and be separated by gender.

Moreover, I have engaged teachers in discussions and activities about some methods they can use to be culturally responsive toward their students' religious holidays and practices. For example, the discussion included ways teachers can be flexible and responsive with Muslim students regarding assessment and assignments during Ramadan and religious holidays.

Furthermore, to ensure that the PD is effective, I incorporated active learning and collaboration among participants by putting them in different groups according to their specialties and encouraging them to move around to write on posters or do learning activities around the room. I have also opened the floor to educators to share the culturally responsive strategies they were already using to support their Muslim students. Finally, I have created opportunities for feedback and reflection by using Google surveys and post-it notes they used to reflect on and put them under different posters around the room.

Project Rationale

As a Muslim immigrant living in the U.S., a teacher of color, and a student of color, I feel the importance of being culturally responsive to my students and their families. I also feel responsible for providing professional development opportunities for fellow educators to help them understand the need to be culturally responsive to the needs of their Muslim students and all their minority students.

Muslim students bring a wealth of linguistic and cultural experiences to classrooms. As an educator for the past 14 years, I could not help noticing how Muslim

students and their families are marginalized and voiceless in the educational process. Therefore, I intended to make this capstone project a mirror that helps non-Muslim educators see their biases and prejudices and a way to see the wealth of knowledge and experiences Muslim students bring to their classrooms instead of pushing them to assimilate with the majority of White students, through a White-centered curriculum and pedagogy.

Project Audience and Setting

The audience for my project is middle and high school administrators, teachers, and staff members. This professional development will help educators create a culturally responsive, inclusive, safe, and engaging learning environment for middle and high school Muslim students who will feel that their Islamic and cultural identities are being validated and appreciated.

This project's setting is a public middle and high school in Jacksonville, Florida, which serves a diverse population of students whose cultural backgrounds represent 14 different languages. Muslim students represent over half of the student population at this school. Their families have spoken to me about certain concerns regarding curriculum, prayer, food preparation and serving, dress code, holidays, gender separation, Ramadan, and PE classes. As discussed in Chapter Two, public schools must adhere to Federal and State laws and guidelines while accommodating these needs and expectations.

Project Assessment

After taking the PD in August, I would ask the participants to survey the areas where they need to be more culturally responsive with their students. Then, based on that, we would create a set of goals they would need to achieve together within the same

school. I would encourage lead teachers to perform weekly informal class observations focusing on culturally responsive practices and follow them up with a check-in with teachers to communicate feedback. I would also encourage teachers to perform monthly peer observations for at least 15 minutes, focusing on using Hollie's VABB strategies, mentioned in Chapter Two, and discussing the observations afterward to provide peer feedback. Finally, I would suggest that lead teachers and supervisors perform a reflecting survey at the end of each semester to evaluate the school's cultural responsiveness towards Muslim students and all their students of color. Families, educators, and students must participate in that survey.

Timeline

After coordinating with the school leaders and taking their permission, I will be organizing and offering my professional development within the first week of teachers' return to school. In such sessions, I will present the main points of my research in a PowerPoint and use multiple visual aids like flip charts, pictures, posters, and videos of experts in the content. The sessions will last for three hours daily over a week to provide 15 hours of professional development. Toward the end of every session, I will meet with different school community members to discuss and evaluate the needs of Muslim students and suggest other practical ways to accommodate such needs without violating any Federal laws or guidelines. The project will be applied in the Fall of 2023, and the findings will be available in the Spring of 2024.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three contained a description of my capstone project, which addressed possible answers to the research question, ***How can culturally responsive instruction***

help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs? The chapter

includes a description of the project, a research rationale of the framework I used to

answer my research question, the setting where the project will be used, the audience, the

measurement method to assess the effectiveness of the project, and the project timeline.

My final product is a one-week professional development during teachers'

in-serve week before school starts in August, targeting non-Muslim educators who

interact with Muslim students throughout the school year. I have built my professional

development project on the work of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), *Effective teacher*

professional development. I have designed the PD to be interactive, encouraging

participants' collaboration and using feedback. The audience of this project was the

teachers and administrators working at a public middle and high school in Jacksonville,

Florida, which serves a significant population of Muslim students. Chapter Four will

include an analysis and synthesis of the results obtained in this research project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion/Reflection

Introduction

In this capstone project, I attempt to answer my research question: ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** Therefore, I focus on the project's two major components: culturally responsive instruction and Muslim students' cultural and religious needs. The project aims at developing a one-week professional development during teachers' in-service week in August.

Overview

Chapter Four includes a personal reflection and highlights the major learnings of this informative journey. In addition, it provides a revisit of the literature review mentioned in Chapter Two and provides possible implications and limitations of the project. It also includes future research projects and my recommendations based on the findings mentioned in the project. Moreover, I will discuss in this chapter my thoughts about communicating my research findings with other researchers. I will also discuss how my research benefits the profession.

Personal Reflection

Generally, the process of this journey added to me personally and professionally. On a personal level, as a Muslim American who belongs to a minoritized group, I feel

even more empowered than before. This is thanks to all the literature I researched. The research deepened my understanding of my rights and duties as a practicing Muslim American. It made me even more proud of who I am and where I come from. The research strengthened my deep belief that I can celebrate both my identities as a practicing Muslim and an American as they both do not contradict and I do not have to compromise one for the other.

Professionally, the research was an eye-opening experience that taught me different perspectives and strategies to empower not only Muslim students but also all minoritized students. As a Muslim American educator and community leader who has been in the field for 14 years, I felt that my teaching experience and my interaction with the Muslim community in Minnesota and Florida on various levels guided the composition of this capstone project.

The deep and meaningful conversations I have had over the past years inside and outside educational buildings have inspired me to voice the needs of future Muslim American leaders. This is done through my professional development. Reflecting on the PD composition, I enjoyed writing and creating each and every aspect of it. I was happy to find a way to challenge stereotypes and biases toward Muslim students inside and outside the classroom. I cherish this opportunity as it gives me a chance to be the voice of many voiceless Muslim students and their families.

Major Learnings

One of the major learnings I have had from composing this project is proper time management and seizing every opportunity to research, add, and edit new ideas as they

come. I have also learned to appreciate the importance of taking short breaks and taking care of myself physically and spiritually. Additionally, brainstorming topics and ideas with family, co-workers, and community members helped me tremendously and widened my professional network.

The second major learning was realizing how much knowledge I gained about minoritized groups, their needs, challenges, and strengths. While the focus of this research was on Muslims living in the U.S., I learned many things I never knew before about other minoritized groups like the African American and Latinx populations. This knowledge gave me new perspectives and increased my sense of responsibility toward supporting all minoritized students and not just Muslims.

The third major learning is about culturally responsive instruction which is now a passion for me. I can never express how much I appreciate what I have learned from Dr. Hollie's work and all the other pioneers in this field. I truly believe that teachers who interact with minoritized students must consider Dr. Hollie's VABB (as explained in Chapter Two). This approach has enriched my teaching style and helped me maintain an authentic relationship with my students and their families regardless of their backgrounds. It also increased my awareness of valuing students' different cultural backgrounds and doing my best to validate and affirm their different cultural practices.

In the previous section, I shared my personal reflection about the process of composing this capstone project. I also shared the major learnings I gained after completing this project. In the next section, I will revisit the literature review I did in

Chapter Two. I will highlight the most influential sources of my work and the connections I had with the literature review.

Literature Review Revisit

As I look back now at the literature review in Chapter Two, I cannot express my deep appreciation for all the pioneers and veterans in the field of culturally responsive instruction and the brave leaders and authors who fought to voice and address Muslim students' needs and challenges. To begin with, I have been developing my research question since the first class in the Master's program. Thanks to my instructors at Hamline University and the literature they chose for the courses, I was empowered to choose minoritized students to focus on. However, after the rich discussions we had during classes on books like *The Critical Race Theory by Delgado and Stefancic (2017), Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning by Hollie (2018), and Ecojustice education toward diverse, democratic, and Sustainable Communities by Martusewicz et al. (2021),* I noticed how Muslims were identified as members of the marginalized groups in the U.S. yet, there was no acknowledgment of their very specific cultural and religious needs, which are definitely unique to them. Therefore, I decided to specifically address Muslim students, hoping to be the voice of the voiceless.

Since this project has two major parts, culturally responsive instruction and identifying and addressing Muslim students' needs, it is essential to mention here the resources I consider the backbone of this project. As for CRI, I consider *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* by Paris and Alim (2017) and *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning by*

Hollie (2018) to have the greatest influence on my choice of this research question and the composition of this project. When I first read Paris and Alim's definition of CSP, I thought this was exactly what Muslim students need. They define CSP as,

> Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) seeks to perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions Dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, and as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. CSP exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities that have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. (p.1)

Muslim students bring a wealth of linguistic and cultural experiences to classrooms. However, unfortunately, educators who look through the lenses of biases and prejudices towards Muslim students do not see that wealth of knowledge and experiences. Therefore, they push them instead to assimilate with White students, through a White-centered curriculum and pedagogy. That is why after reading these two books, I decided to build my project on their great work.

Regarding identifying and addressing Muslim students' needs, I find *Engaging Muslim Students in public schools: What educators need to Understand by* Abraham (2020) to have the greatest influence on my project. As a Muslim American educator himself, not only did he explicitly explain the needs and challenges of Muslim students, but he also provided very strong literature explaining the reasons why Muslim students

would act or react in certain ways when it comes to things that may appear to educators as simple or logical. As a Muslim educator myself, I made many connections to Abraham's book. I find the needs he has identified to be absolutely true and I personally and professionally agree with his suggested accommodations and recommendations.

In my opinion, to understand the cultural practices of a certain group of people, you need to have a comprehensive understanding of their history. This includes when, where they came from, and how they became the people they are today. That is why I found it imperative in my project to mention the history of Islam and Muslims, especially in the U.S. since the common understanding is distorted by Islamophobia and what "popular media" shows. Therefore, I find *Lost Islamic History: Reclaiming Muslim Civilization from the Past* by Alkhateeb (2017) and the research done by Zerara and Maameri (2017) *Muslims' presence in pre-Columbian America* to be vital to my project since they provide detailed explanations about Muslims' background in the U.S. In fact, much of the information mentioned in both resources was new to me, which led me to research deeper to understand many events. I did my utmost to provide in this project a very brief summary of the events that have affected Muslims' presence in the U.S. in the past and during the present time.

In this section, I have revisited the literature review for my capstone project. I have also highlighted the names of authors and resources that I consider the backbone of my research. In the next section, I will share some possible implications and limitations of this project.

Implications and Limitations

I strongly believe that a few realizations will contribute to the successful implementation of this project. Educators need to be familiar with and actively apply culturally responsive instructional strategies. This is so they can validate and affirm Muslim students, as well as all other minoritized students' cultural and religious identities. Educators must be open-minded and willing to challenge their own biases and prejudices. They also need to be willing to learn about the various cultures of Muslim students and their religious practices that need to take place during the school day and get affected by the daily schedule or routines. In addition, educators must challenge Islamophobia signs in the curriculum and inside and outside the classroom.

One of the major limitations that may lead to the unsuccessful implementation of this project would be narrow-minded school or district policies that are culturally irresponsive to Muslim students' needs and do not support teachers to be fully culturally responsive. For example, a school policy that looks at Muslim girls' hijab and forms of modesty as out of uniform or a policy that creates an academic calendar with school-wide testing dates without considering important religious celebrations. Another limitation would be the lack of professional development and resources schools should provide to teachers targeting culturally responsive pedagogies. This would include inclusiveness of all students' cultures.

Future Research and Recommendations

In general, I noticed how my writing and research skills had improved tremendously. I have developed a passion for researching and digging deeper into certain topics. Islamic history, Muslims' contribution to various fields worldwide throughout

history, Muslim existence in the U.S., minoritized groups' educational issues, and culturally responsive pedagogies are all possible future research topics.

Based on my research findings, I highly recommend educators and schools include in their school resources or teachers' library copies of culturally responsive books by the pioneers mentioned in this research such as Dr. Hollie's and Paris and Alim's remarkable books. Also, I highly recommend that schools serving Muslim students add to their resources Abraham's (2020) *Engaging Muslim students in public schools: What educators need to understand.* Abraham Education. This book is an excellent resource for understanding and addressing Muslim needs in the classroom.

Moreover, I highly recommend that school administrations facilitate teacher-peer observations focusing on cultural responsiveness to Muslim students and all minoritized students, as I truly believe that the most effective way to learn is to observe and be observed. Teachers get honest feedback from each other to see what they are doing well and what they need to change. I also encourage administrators to perform weekly non-formal observations of classrooms focusing on cultural responsiveness followed by a 15-minute check-in to discuss strengths and areas for improvement.

Regarding communicating the results of this project and how it can benefit other educators in the field, first, I plan to publish this project online and make it available to educators across the nation. Second, I am planning to reach out to public schools with a Muslim population in Florida and offer professional development to cover the two topics of this project: culturally responsive instruction and addressing Muslim cultural and religious needs in the educational setting. Third, the audience for my project is middle

and high school administrators, teachers, and staff members. Therefore, I anticipate that this professional development will help educators create a culturally responsive, all-inclusive, safe, and engaging learning environment for middle and high school Muslim students who will feel their Islamic and cultural identities are validated and appreciated. Fourth, I believe that the literature covered in my professional development offers practical solutions and answers. I also hope that it serves as an academic resource for stakeholders with similar concerns nationwide. Fifth, I hope this project will inspire educators across the globe to be more culturally responsive, not only to Muslim students but also to all minoritized students.

In the previous section, I shared some possible topics for future research and recommendations for schools and educators to ensure school-wide culturally responsive instruction.

Summary

In Chapter Four I shared a personal reflection and a highlight of the major learnings I gained throughout the process of composing this capstone project. In this capstone project, I attempted to find answers to my research question: ***How can culturally responsive instruction help middle and high school teachers address Muslim students' needs?*** My reflection included a revisit of the literature review mentioned in Chapter Two and described possible implications and limitations of the project. I also included possible future research projects and my recommendations based on the findings mentioned in the project. Finally, I discussed in this chapter my thoughts about

communicating the research findings with other researchers and how my research can benefit the profession.

To conclude, this project is the fruit of my experience, and the result of six months of consistent researching, reading, adding, deleting, and editing. I truly enjoyed every word I typed in this research paper. I appreciate this opportunity to share my research and findings on the topic I am most passionate about with other educators. I focused on the project's two major components: culturally responsive instruction and Muslim students' cultural and religious needs hoping that this project inspires educators to provide the support needed not only to Muslim students but also to all minoritized students.

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